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SUBJECT: WHY ALL THE FUSS ABOUT THE "CUBAN FIVE"?

REF: A. HAVANA 592 ("GOC SIGNALS READINESS TO MOVE
FORWARD")
[1](#)B. HAVANA 721 ("MILITARY EXERCISES FAIL TO ROUSE
CUBANS")
[1](#)C. HAVANA 594 (CUBA CHAMPIONS HUMAN RIGHTS AND
DEMOCRACY IN HONDURAS)

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[1](#)1. (SBU) Despite mammoth efforts by the GOC in pressing the case of the five Cuban and Cuban-American spies in U.S. jails, most Cubans don't really know or even care about their fate. The spies' value to the GOC is mostly for propaganda and, domestically at least, it has not returned the huge investment that the government has staked in the case.

CUBAN FIVE EVERYWHERE YOU GO

[1](#)2. (SBU) The lengths to which the Cuban Government (GOC) has gone in making a public issue of the five Cubans and Cuban-Americans convicted in 2001 for spying in the United States are significant. The "Cuban Five" (also known in Havana as the "Five Heroes") are omnipresent on the island: on the covers of all newspapers, on billboards and walls in the streets, on the radio and TV, on every government reception hall, in cultural and academic centers, and in all schools, including the Latin American School of Medicine sitting room where WHA DAS Williams met with American students (Ref A).

[1](#)3. (SBU) Former President Fidel Castro has written several Reflections about the Five, while brother and current President Raul attended the funeral of the mother of one of the spies last month. National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon has serialized no less than 14 episodes, and still counting, on the court proceedings of the Five. Cuban students, a father of one told us, are made to write essays about the Five in grade school.

PRESSING THE CASE INTERNATIONALLY

[1](#)4. (SBU) Cuba has also unleashed a tenacious international campaign. The GOC has engineered or successfully lobbied for international petitions and demonstrations on behalf of the Five, and even got Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos to meet

with wives of the Five in Madrid last November. EU Cooperation Commissioner Karel de Gucht went as far to state that he saw an "obvious link" between the release of the Five in the United States and of the hundreds of prisoners of conscience that the GOC holds. Indeed, the GOC has publicly stated that it would be willing to consider releasing political prisoners if the Five are "returned" (two of the five spies are American citizens).

GENERAL INDIFFERENCE TO THE FIVE IN CUBA

15. (SBU) Despite the unrelenting domestic and international campaign on behalf of its "Five Heroes," Cubans appear mostly indifferent to their fate. "Oh, God, I can't stand it, everywhere you turn, it's the Five this and the Five that," the wife of a noted jailed dissident told us. But when Polcouns asked her to name them, she couldn't. In fact, USINT officers have asked several dozen Cubans at random to name the Five and no one has been able to name even four of them. "Jose... Roberto, or is it Ramon?... I don't know, I don't get involved in politics," a medical technician told PolCouns, before giving up. "Hell if I know, who are these people anyway?" a bookseller of revolutionary materials in Old Havana told us. Ironically, the only person in Cuba who knew the names of all the spies was an activist for prisoners of conscience in Cuba. "But I have to know! My whole life revolves around people in jail," he replied with a smile.

AS A RALLYING CRY THE FIVE ARE NO ELIAN

16. (SBU) Most observers in Cuba believe that the GOC's campaign is primarily aimed to motivate people on the island

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to rally behind the government. "They want to make this into another Elian," a contact told us, in reference to the 1999 campaign to seek the return from the United States of a child who was the sole survivor of an escape by raft from Cuba. "But it's not catching on." As a dissident political observer explained, the level of mass participation in Cuba has fallen dramatically, and most people are exhausted of political mongering. Like the military exercises to prepare against a U.S. invasion (Ref B), the "outcry" over elections in Honduras (Ref C) and countless other manufactured campaigns, GOC efforts to energize an apathetic populace seem to be failing.

A PROPAGANDA FAILURE

17. (SBU) The GOC, it seems, has seen scant return on its massive investment in trying to raise the profile of the five spies. Many international partners have obliged, but their public support is as much for domestic audiences in Cuba as for the international community. "Nobody cares outside Cuba, and it's important to (the GOC), so why not?" was how an EU diplomat explained his Foreign Minister's public solidarity with the Five. Some in Cuba, perhaps their former handlers or colleagues, may truly care about the fate of the Five, but it seems clear that the main value of the spies to the GOC is as a propaganda tool for Cubans on the island. In that sense, it has been a failure. Even if the Cuban government were to successfully position the Five as bargaining chips for prisoner exchanges, it would gain little more than the minor "vindication" of seeing its political prisoners equated with spies.

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